DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 357 429 EA 024 830

AUTHOR Easton, John Q.; And Others
TITLE Local School Council Governance: The Third Year of Chicago School Reform.
INSTITUTION Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance, IL.
PUB DATE Mar 93
NOTE 37p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Community Involvement; *Decision Making; Elementary Secondary Education; *Governance; Meetings; Parent Participation; Policy Formation; *Problem Solving; Program Evaluation; *Public Schools
IDENTIFIERS *Chicago Public Schools IL; *Local School Councils

ABSTRACT

This report proposes a new framework for understanding the different governance approaches taken by Local School Councils (LSCs) throughout the Chicago Public Schools, based on data collected during the 1991-92 school year. Meeting supervisors covered 155 council meetings at 14 randomly selected, representative schools, and interviewed principals, LSC chairpersons, and other key school community members. The framework identifies and describes four LSC school governance approaches: limited, moderate, balanced, and excessive. The four categories encapsulated some perceived general LSC involvement patterns and seemed congruent with two other variables--participation and motions. The limited-governance LSCs had low member participation and made very few motions during their 1991-92 meetings. Moderate-governance LSCs had medium participation and motion rates, very cordial relations with school staff, and efficiently run meetings dominated by the principal. The balanced-governance councils had moderately high scores on both variables, were true leaders in their schools, and took stands on community issues. The excessive-governance LSCs had high participation rates, made more motions than other councils, and ran antagonistic, numerous, and lengthy meetings. Balanced governance, a style requiring shared leadership, mutual respect, and a strong commitment from all LSC members, describes councils that have assumed the most effective roles in school policy making. Included are several figures, sidebars, and an executive summary. (MLH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED357429

MONITORING AND RESEARCHING THE EFFECTS OF SCHOOL REFORM IN CHICAGO

Local School Council Governance:

The Third Year of Chicago School Reform

John Q. Easton
Susan Leigh Flinspach
Carla O'Connor
Mark Paul
Jesse Qualls
Susan P. Ryan

March 1993

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

G. A. Hess

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance
220 South State Street, Suite 1212, Chicago, Illinois 60604 (312) 939-2202

EA 024 830

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance

Lauren E. Allen, President
Sylvia Puente, Vice President
Nelson Ndove, Treasurer; Gwendolyn Laroche, Secretary
Tee Gallay, Honorary President; G. Alfred Hess, Jr., Executive Director

The Chicago Panel is a coalition of the following member organizations

American Jewish Committee
Aspira Inc., of Illinois
Center for Neighborhood Technology
Chicago Region PTA
Chicago United
Chicago Urban League
Chicago Westside Branch N.A.A.C.P.
Citizens Schools Committee
Community Renewal Society
Erie Neighborhood House
Jewish Council on Urban Affairs
Junior League of Chicago, Inc.
Latino Institute
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
League of Women Voters of Chicago
Metropolitan Mission Strategy Organization of the United Methodist Church
Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund
United Neighborhood Organization of Chicago
The Woodlawn Organization
Youth Guidance

Monitoring and Research Project Staff

John Q. Easton, Director of Monitoring and Research
Jesse Qualls, Coordinator of Monitoring
Paul Dean, Susan Flinspach, David Kerbow,
Ong Kim Lee, Mark Paul, Carla O'Connor, Susan Ryan,
Yeow Meng Thum, and Sandra Storey, Research Analysts

Major funding for the Monitoring and Research Project is provided by

The Chicago Community Trust
The Field Foundation of Illinois
The Lloyd A. Fry Foundation
The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
The Spencer Foundation
The Woods Charitable Fund

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the 14 Local School Councils involved in this study for their assistance, their time, and their openness. These councils welcome us as friends into their school communities. They readily provide us with materials and other information. Council members have graciously made time for both formal and informal interviews. They keep us informed about council and school matters, and notify us of changes in meeting schedules. We sincerely appreciate the courtesy and kindness shown us by all 14 Local School Councils.

Over the years of our study, we have developed increasing respect for the difficult tasks that the councils face. We have also learned that they receive very little appreciation for their work. We would like to go on record and thank them for their school improvement efforts.

This report describes both successes and set-backs in this small group of Local School Councils. We hope that it both informs and helps these councils and others to improve, and that it is also useful to students of school reform and policy makers.

Thanks to Darryl Ford, Paula Gill, Todd Ricard, and Sandra Storey for help with data collection and data analysis.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary 1

A Governance Framework 3
- Four governance categories 3
- The governance framework 5

Local School Council Meetings 8
- Council attendance 9
- Council meeting subject matter 10
- Participation at Local School Council meetings 13
- How councils discuss budget and finance topics 17
- Summary 20

Characteristics of Governance Styles and Leadership Patterns 22
- Limited governance 22
- Excessive governance 24
- Moderate governance 26
- Balanced governance 30

Executive Summary

In this report, we propose a new framework for understanding the different approaches to governance taken by Local School Councils (LSCs) throughout the Chicago Public Schools. The framework is based on data collected during the 1991-92 academic year. Meeting observers covered 155 council meetings at 14 schools randomly selected to reflect the school system's geographic and ethnic composition, and held formal and informal interviews with principals, LSC chairpersons, and other key members of those school communities. We use both quantitative and qualitative analyses of the data to illustrate our governance framework.

The framework identifies and describes four approaches that LSCs take to school governance: limited governance; moderate governance; balanced governance; and excessive governance. Meeting observers first conceived of the four approaches as groups of councils that seemed to "go together," even though no single criterion clearly distinguished the LSCs in one group from those in the others. Observers agreed, though, that the four categories encapsulated some general patterns of LSC involvement with school governance. Then we found that the combination of two of our quantitative variables describing meetings—participation and motions—partitioned the 14 councils into the same four groups. Both the two variables and the perceptions of meeting observers operationalize a concept dealing with how actively councils govern, how they exchange information, how they make decisions, and how they solve problems—in short, how they approach school governance.

The **limited-governance LSCs** had low member participation and made very few motions during their 1991-92 meetings. Two of the 14 LSCs in our sample followed this pattern. These councils were not active and they did not provide much leadership for the schools. School professionals, particularly the principals, controlled these LSCs. Parent and community members had poor attendance and took little part in the meetings. At times the principals and teacher members were at odds with one another, but the principals clearly dominated council proceedings and decisions. Council deliberations were often superficial, and consisted largely of the principals or teachers presenting ideas that the LSCs then quickly approved. Although parent and community representatives trusted the school professionals, the latter did not always provide the necessary information about their proposals for thoughtful LSC consideration. Council meetings tended to be numerous, but short, and the LSCs covered few topics per meeting. Thus, limited governance is an extreme approach in which the LSC remains a largely unused resource.

Moderate-governance LSCs had a range of values from medium low to medium high on the participation and motion variables. Seven of the 14 councils practiced moderate governance in 1991-92. Moderate councils were not active leaders of their schools except in crisis situations, when they could mobilize tremendous energy and resources to confront a problem. The principals led these LSCs, although the chairpersons ran the meetings. Except for the chairpersons, parent representatives took little part in council deliberations or business. Principals tended to bring ideas to the councils' attention, make proposals about the schools, and take charge of the discussions. They generally provided some information about their recommendations to the councils, but sometimes they did not. The LSC members trusted the school professionals, and council relations were very cordial. Moderate-governance LSCs usually held monthly meetings at which they dealt with numerous topics in an efficient manner. We suspect that moderate governance may be the most typical governance style among Chicago LSCs.

The **balanced-governance councils** had moderately high scores on both the participation and motions variables. Three of the 14 LSCs used a balanced approach to governance in 1991-92. These councils were true leaders in their schools, and they sometimes took active stands on community issues as well. The principals and council chairpersons shared leadership,

and parent and community representatives played a vital role on these LSCs. Council relations were generally amicable, transcending member disagreements on particular subjects. Members tended to trust one another and exchange information freely. They discussed important issues in depth before making decisions. They also worked out mechanisms to hold themselves accountable for implementing those decisions. Meetings typically were productive and relatively efficient in terms of discussions and decision making. For these reasons, we believe that the balanced style of school governance is better than the other three approaches.

Excessive-governance LSCs had high participation rates and they proposed motions on many more topics than the other councils. During 1991-92, two of the 14 LSCs followed this style of governance. They were extremely active and they played an important—if not well-defined—role in school leadership. The chairpersons were the council leaders, a fact that encouraged greater parent members' participation in LSC meetings and business. The councils and their principals had developed long-term antagonistic relationships, and members did not trust one another. Council discussions were lengthy, and often marred by angry outbursts and factionalism. Members frequently complained that they did not have access to all the information needed for decision making. Meetings tended to be long; they were also numerous because periodically these councils could not finish their agendas in one meeting. The high level of activity characteristic of an excessive approach to governance is generally counterproductive.

We propose that the four approaches to school governance—as described above—generally classify the diversity found among Chicago Local School Councils. Nevertheless, the distribution of our 14 LSCs in terms of those four approaches is accurate for their 1991-92 meetings only. LSCs can and do change over time. New elections and the filling of vacancies lead to changes in council membership, which in turn can alter an LSC's role in school policy making. Some LSCs selected new principals who have had radical effects on their styles of acquiring information, making decisions, and solving problems. In addition, a change in council priorities can also leave an LSC free to pursue a new kind of leadership in its school. We stress that, over time, individual councils can alter how they govern their school communities.

In conclusion, we lay out a governance framework in this report and argue that balanced governance is best. A combination of the participation and motions variables delineates which of the four approaches to school governance (limited, moderate, balanced, and excessive) a council has taken over a given period of time. Factors concerning how council members gather and share information, how they make decisions, and how they solve problems characterize each approach. Balanced governance, a governing style that requires shared leadership, mutual respect, and a strong commitment from all LSC members, describes those councils that have assumed the most effective roles in school policy making.

A Governance Framework

The Local School Council (LSC), the governing body of each of the more than 500 Chicago Public Schools, is one of the cornerstones of Chicago school reform. LSCs are composed of six parents, two teachers, two community members, the school principal, and a student representative in the high schools. In this report, we propose a new LSC framework consisting of four approaches to school governance: limited governance; moderate governance; balanced governance; and excessive governance. Each approach characterizes a particular role for the LSCs in school policy making and leadership, reflecting differences in their effectiveness in school governance.

In September, 1989, the Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance began a study of Local School Councils in order to learn about the implementation of Chicago school reform. Our observers have regularly attended council meetings since January, 1990. We started with twelve schools that winter, and then added two more the following academic year. The 14 schools (ten elementary and four high schools) were randomly selected so that they would reflect the school system's geographic and ethnic composition. By the end of the 1991-92 school year, we had observed over 400 council meetings in these schools.

At the meetings, our observers recorded the attendance and participation of LSC members, and noted the topics discussed. In addition, they covered numerous school events and many LSC committee meetings (for example, LSC candidate forums and meetings of school improvement planning committees). The governance framework in this report is based on the 155 council meetings (of 163 held at the sample schools) that we observed between the election of new councils in October, 1991, and the end of June, 1992. In addition, we used data from other school observations and from both formal and informal interviews with key members of the school communities in this report.

In our earlier publications about Local School Councils, we stressed the enormous variability within our sample of 14 councils. A few of these LSCs continually struggle with the basics of securing a quorum and conducting routine business, while others are thoroughly engaged in the process of improving their schools. In this report on the 1991-92 council meetings, however, we focus on both differences and similarities among LSCs.

Four governance categories

From our continuous coverage of council meetings at these schools, we discovered that some LSCs share characteristics with others over given periods of time. In considering the 14 councils during their 1991-92 meetings, our LSC meeting observers identified four clusters of councils that seemed to "go together," even though no single criterion clearly distinguished any one group from the others. The differences among the four groups included variation in the following factors: the LSC's level of activity and leadership in the school; the type of leadership on the council itself; the degree to which parent and community representatives took part in the LSC; the depth and nature of discussions during the meetings; LSC interpersonal relations and trust; the extent of the free flow of information among members; council accountability for decisions made; and the character of LSC meetings. Meeting observers agreed that the four groups of LSCs encapsulated some general patterns of council involvement with school governance. We named the four governance categories (limited, moderate, balanced, and excessive) according to those patterns.

As might be expected, the limited-governance councils demonstrated little participation with school governance. Two of the 14 LSCs were in this group. These councils were not active and they did not provide much leadership for the schools. School professionals, particularly the principals, controlled these LSCs. Parent and community members had poor attendance and took little part in the meetings. At times the principals and teacher members were at odds with

one another, but the principals clearly dominated council proceedings and decisions. Council deliberations were often superficial, and consisted largely of the principals or teachers presenting ideas that the LSCs then quickly approved. Although parent and community representatives trusted the school professionals, the latter did not always provide the necessary information about their proposals for thoughtful LSC consideration. Council meetings tended to be numerous, but short, and the LSCs covered few topics per meeting. Thus, limited-governance councils took an extreme approach to school leadership in which the LSC remained a largely unused resource.

Seven of the 14 councils practiced moderate governance in 1991-92. Moderate councils were not active leaders of their schools except in crisis situations, when they could mobilize tremendous energy and resources to confront a problem. The principals led these LSCs, although the chairpersons ran the meetings. Except for the chairpersons, parent representatives took little part in council deliberations or business. Principals tended to bring ideas to the councils' attention, make proposals about the schools, and take charge of the discussions. They generally provided some information about their recommendations to the councils, but sometimes they did not. The LSC members trusted the school professionals, and council relations were very cordial. Moderate-governance LSCs usually held monthly meetings at which they dealt with numerous topics in an efficient manner. We suspect that moderate-governance councils are fairly typical of the LSCs in Chicago Public Schools.

The balanced-governance councils, three of the 14 LSCs, were true leaders in their schools, and at times they took active stands on community issues as well. The principals and council chairpersons shared leadership, and parent and community representatives played a vital role on these LSCs. Council relations were generally amicable, transcending member disagreements on particular subjects. Members tended to trust one another and exchange information freely. They discussed important issues in depth before making decisions. They also worked out mechanisms to hold themselves accountable for implementing those decisions. Meetings typically were productive and relatively efficient in terms of discussions and decision making. For these reasons, we believe that the balanced-governance LSCs took a better approach to school governance than the councils in other groups.

Two of the 14 LSCs were excessive-governance councils. They were extremely active and they played an important—if not well-defined—role in school leadership. The chairpersons were the council leaders, a fact that encouraged greater parent participation in LSC meetings and business. The councils and their principals had developed long-term antagonistic relationships, and members did not trust one another. Council discussions were lengthy, and often marred by angry outbursts and factionalism. Members frequently complained that they did not have access to all the information needed for decision making. Meetings tended to be long; they were also numerous because periodically these councils could not finish their agendas in one meeting. The high level of activity characteristic of excessive-governance councils was counterproductive.

This categorization of the 14 LSCs accurately represents our sample of councils during their 1991-92 meetings only. LSCs can and do change over time. New elections and the filling of vacancies lead to changes in council membership, which in turn can alter an LSC's participation in school policy making. Some LSCs selected new principals who have had radical effects on their methods of acquiring information, making decisions, and solving problems. In addition, a change in council priorities can also leave an LSC free to pursue a new kind of school leadership. We stress that, over time, individual councils can alter how they govern their school communities.

We believe that the balanced-governance councils had a better method of school governance during 1991-92 than the other LSCs in our sample. Clearly school improvements may take place under any type of governance, and all 14 LSCs took some steps to enrich the educational climate and services of their schools. Yet, balanced-governance councils tended to assume more effective roles in school policy making and leadership. We encourage LSC members and others interested in improving school governance to focus on the characteristics of balanced-governance councils presented throughout this report.

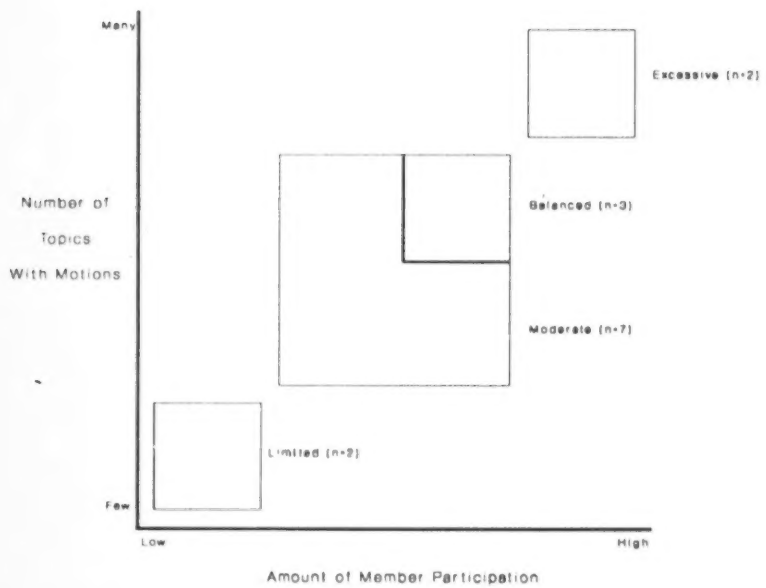
The governance framework

We are proposing a governance framework based on the four categories of Local School Councils. The categories associate the 14 councils in our sample with four particular patterns of LSC behavior during the 1991-92 school year. Under our framework, though, we regard the four patterns of LSC behavior as more than just a way to describe the 14 LSCs in the given time period; they also serve as distinct approaches to school governance. This means that we expect the four patterns or approaches (limited, moderate, balanced, and excessive) to categorize in a general way the governance behavior of most of Chicago's councils over several years of school reform. LSCs may consistently follow a single approach, or they may abandon one governance style and eventually adopt another. Although only a first attempt at modeling LSC governance, this framework sets some working boundaries for conveniently characterizing an incredibly wide range of council behavior.

We searched for criteria that would clearly and precisely define the four approaches to governance. As introduced in the previous section, the four approaches differ in many ways, such as the LSC's level of activity and leadership in the school, the extent of the free flow of information among members, the degree of parent and community involvement with the LSC, etc. Meeting observers could not isolate one or two factors distinguishing one governance style from the others, and so we turned to our quantitative data to differentiate the four categories of the framework. Quantitative definitions of the approaches will permit us to test the framework at a later date, using our own data from previous and subsequent years and data from other researchers.

We found that the combination of two of our quantitative variables describing the 1991-92 council meetings (participation and motions) divided the 14 LSCs into the same four groups meeting observers had identified (see Figure 1). Participation has to do with the involvement of every council member in the total governing process, and motions indicate the degree of

Figure 1: Four Governance-Based Categories of Local School Councils



formalism an LSC uses in its decision making. Like the impressions of meeting observers, the two variables operationalize a concept dealing with how actively councils govern, how they exchange information, how they make decisions, and how they solve problems—in short, how they approach school governance.

The *participation* variable that we use consists of the total number of council members participating in the discussion of each topic at every meeting.[1] An LSC with many participants on most of its topics generally has a higher participation score than a council with few participants in its discussions. In addition, though, the more topics an LSC discusses at its meetings and the more meetings it holds, the higher its score is likely to be on our participation variable. Thus defined, participation is one measure of overall council activity (see Table 1).

The *motions* variable is the total number of discussion topics on which council members propose motions.[2] A council that proposes more motions than other LSCs has a higher motion score. Again the number of an LSC's topics and of its meetings can influence the frequency of its motions, but the relationships are not as strongly correlated as with the participation variable. Some councils simply make more motions than others, and we accept this as an indicator of the formality of LSC decision making.

Table 1
Participation and Motions by Category of Council

	Governance Types			
	Limited	***Moderate***	***Balanced***	***Excessive***
Average amount of member *participation*	224	326	433	684
Average number of topics with *motions*	5	22	24	59

On its own, neither variable clearly separates the LSCs into the same four groups designated by meeting observers. Combined, however, the variables divide the 14 LSCs into three separate categories, with a subgroup within the largest (see Figure 1), that correspond with meeting observers' perceptions. The two LSCs using a limited approach to governance during 1991-92 had the least participation and fewest motions. Their meetings tended to be short and informal, with relatively little discussion. The moderate-governance LSCs in the sample had a range of medium scores on both variables. Some moderate LSCs had a higher score on one variable and a lower score on the other. In contrast, balanced-governance LSCs had moderately high scores on both variables. The meetings of the three balanced LSCs tended to be more active and formal than those of the moderate councils, with many participants involved in the discussions. The two excessive-governance LSCs had high scores on both the participation and motions variables. Their meetings, often explosive in nature, engendered lots of participation. The many disagreements among excessive-governance LSC members led to frequent motions and votes, as everyone favored keeping formal records of their decisions. Thus, the participation and motions variables together classify the 14 LSCs (as represented by their 1991-92 meetings) into the same four categories that meeting observers developed, and so we use them to differentiate the four approaches to governance.

[1] We estimate the amount of participation at the few meetings we are unable to attend based on the participation at the meetings we do attend.

[2] The variable does not include motions to accept the minutes of previous LSC meetings or motions to adjourn.

In the framework, the participation and motions variables define the four styles of governance; yet numerous other factors from the 1991-92 meetings played a part in distinguishing one group of councils from the others. Some of those variables may also be characteristic of the four approaches to governance, but some may not be. Longitudinal analysis of our data from the 14 LSCs should eventually clarify these relationships.

The rest of this report describes and illustrates the four approaches to school governance. The next section presents more of the quantitative data (attendance, topics of discussion, and participation of LSC members) from the 1991-92 meetings, followed by a detailed analysis of member participation on budget and finance topics. In the third section, we report on the governance and council leadership patterns we discovered from meeting observations and from interviews with principals and LSC chairpersons. We include numerous illustrations and anecdotes from LSC meetings. Readers may request a *Technical Appendix* that contains tables comparable to those published in our first- and second-year reports. It also explains our coding strategies and discusses our variables in greater detail.

Local School Council Meetings

We have categorized the 14 Local School Councils in our sample into four groups that take different approaches to school governance. We base the categories on the perceptions of the meeting observers and on two variables, participation and motions, which describe the 1991-92 council meetings (see previous section). In addition, we find that the four groups of councils are distinguished from each other by many other factors, some of which are related to participation and motions.

The number of meetings held from the new elections in October, 1991, through June, 1992, and the duration of those meetings are two characteristics that differentiate some LSCs from others (see Table 2). Both the limited-governance and the excessive-governance councils tended to meet more often than LSCs in the other two groups. On average, the two extreme groups held 15 or 16 meetings during 1991-92.[3] The other groups met fewer times—about nine times for the moderate councils and 12 for the balanced councils. The nine meetings of the moderate councils represent monthly meetings for the October to June span of this study. The balanced councils also had monthly meetings, but held a few additional meetings in the spring when the work load was heavier.

Table 2
1991-92 LSC Meeting Descriptions by Category of Council

	Governance Types			
	Limited	*Moderate*	*Balanced*	*Excessive*
Number of meetings	15.5	9.0	12.3	16.5
Average length of meetings (minutes)	55	120	129	149
Average # LSC members attending [4]	6.8	8.6	9.4	8.2
Average # topics considered per meeting	5.9	10.7	9.2	9.5
Average # of participants per topic	2.5	3.4	3.8	4.5

Although the councils in the two extreme groups (limited and excessive governance) met equally as often, their meetings were notably different. In contrast to the typical two-and-one-half-hour meetings of the excessive-governance LSCs, the limited-governance councils held short meetings that lasted less than one hour. In all, they spent only about one third as many hours in meetings as the excessive-governance councils. The moderate and balanced councils met for about two hours at a time, but the balanced group met more often.

Attendance also varied quite a bit from one category of councils to another. The balanced-governance councils (the councils that we believe were most effective) had the highest member attendance, with over nine of 11 members, on average, present. The moderate-governance LSCs and the excessive-governance councils rank second and third, respectively, averaging between eight and nine members at their meetings. The two extreme categories had lower average member attendance than the balanced and moderate groups, with the limited-governance councils having by far the lowest rate. Although their average attendance

[3] Generally the LSCs in a category are similar to one another on most characteristics. Exceptions do occur, however. For example, the two limited-governance councils differ in terms of the number of meetings held, with one LSC meeting twenty-one times and the other only ten times.

[4] Student representatives are excluded from high school council attendance statistics to make them comparable to those from elementary schools.

exceeded the legal quorum of six, limited-governance LSCs continually faced problems such as beginning meetings late, having insufficient members present to approve a motion, and holding lengthy discussions about absences and vacancies, which are associated with poor member attendance.

The number of topics discussed in the course of a meeting and the average time spent on those discussions also differed across categories. During a meeting, limited-governance councils discussed about six different topics, on the average, whereas the other groups considered between nine and 11 topics. Given the much shorter meetings held by limited-governance LSCs, this is a predictable finding. More surprising, perhaps, is the fact that the average duration of their discussion about a topic was still considerably less than the discussion time per topic of other councils (about nine minutes per topic for the limited-governance group). Although the moderate-governance councils considered the greatest number of topics in a meeting, they did not allocate as much time per topic as either the balanced- or excessive-governance councils, which spent between 14 and 16 minutes, on average, discussing each topic.

In accord with their lower attendance rates and briefer topic discussions, the limited-governance councils also had the least amount of member participation on any given topic. On average, about 2.5 members discussed each topic that a limited-governance LSC considered. In the excessive-governance councils, participation was higher, at about 4.5 members per topic. The excessive councils had greater participation per topic than the balanced and moderate councils, even though they had lower attendance. As described in the previous section, total member participation helps to define the four approaches to governance, and here we find that participation by topic parallels those differences in total participation.

Both the balanced-governance and the excessive-governance councils displayed "more" of many behaviors than the LSCs in the other two categories. We believe that the excessive councils usually had "too much" of these factors—too many meetings that were too long, with too much fruitless discussion, and too many votes. Their meetings were overly formal and the members were often factionalized and distrustful of each other. The balanced councils also invested more time and energy in meetings than did LSCs in the limited- and moderate-governance groups, but they optimized these factors at high, not excessive, levels. Their decision-making process was efficient and effective. We delve into some of these issues and the possible reasons for them throughout this report.

Council attendance

As noted earlier in this section, the average attendance of adult council members at the 1991-92 meetings differed by LSC category. Similarly, LSC representatives' attendance by role (principal, chairperson, other parent member, community representative, or teacher) also varied with the council's approach to governance (see Table 3). In each group of LSCs, the chairperson's attendance was higher than the average attendance of all the other parents and than the average community member attendance. The balanced-governance councils stand out for having the highest parent and community member attendance, whereas the limited-governance councils had very low attendance among these representatives; typically, fewer than half of the parent members, excluding the chairperson, attended limited-governance council meetings. The attendance of community representatives was poorest in the excessive-governance category, at about 50 percent.

School professionals—the principal and the two teacher representatives—attended LSC meetings fairly regularly. As a rule, principal attendance at council meetings is very high, with occasional absences due to illnesses or emergencies. Nonetheless, during the latter part of the school year, the principal of one of the excessive-governance LSCs deliberately skipped council meetings because they had become so rancorous that she preferred not to attend. Perhaps also due to the amount of conflict at meetings, teacher attendance was lowest among the excessive-governance LSCs. The limited-governance councils had the highest teacher attendance.

In fact, the principal and teacher representatives on one of the limited-governance LSCs commented that the responsibility for running the council "fell" to them because of poor parent attendance.

Table 3
1991-92 LSC Meeting Attendance by Role on Council

	Governance Types			
	Limited	*Moderate*	*Balanced*	*Excessive*
Average # LSC members attending	6.8	8.6	9.4	8.2
Principal attendance	92%	100%	95%	85%
Chairperson attendance	74%	94%	97%	96%
Other parent attendance	42%	66%	79%	71%
Community attendance	52%	76%	83%	51%
Teacher attendance	97%	92%	92%	81%
Average adult guest attendance	5.9	7.4	8.8	13.9

The balanced-governance LSCs had the highest overall attendance, and the best attendance of parent and community members. They had relatively high principal attendance (95 percent) and teacher attendance (92 percent) as well. The three balanced Local School Councils maintained a high level of engagement and commitment among all of their constituencies.

Adult guest attendance at council meetings, a sign of parent and community involvement with LSC affairs, also varied from group to group. The excessive-governance councils had the highest guest attendance (about 14 adults per meeting). The balanced-governance councils had next highest (about nine), followed in predictable order by the moderate-governance councils (with seven) and the limited-governance councils with the lowest (about six).

Patterns in the member attendance data highlight differences among the four LSC approaches. On the limited-governance councils, the school professionals, especially the teachers, had much better rates of attendance than the community and parent representatives. This is one indicator of the professional dominance characteristic of limited-governance LSCs. Relative to other councils, excessive-governance LSCs had much lower attendance among professional educators and fairly high attendance among parents, especially the chairperson. On these councils, the higher attendance of the chairpersons and the lower principal attendance reflect the LSC conflicts with professional authority. Moderate councils had the highest principal attendance, but they did not stand out much from the balanced LSCs in terms of most attendance rates. Balanced-governance LSCs had the best overall attendance, best parent attendance (including or excluding the chairperson), and best community representative attendance. As might be expected, their attendance rates demonstrate the more equal (balanced) engagement and commitment of all LSC constituencies.

Council meeting subject matter

In order to analyze the subject matter of Local School Council meetings, we divide them into "topics" of discussion. Each topic is a theme or subject, often synonymous with an agenda item, that ends when the focus of discussion moves on to another issue. We code the topics in one of seven ways:[5] LSC topics (concerns with running the LSC, LSC business, and member social interactions); school program topics (school administration, curriculum and instruction, school

[5] The following coding categories are listed from most frequently discussed to least frequently discussed during the council meetings of the previous school year. For more information on topic definition and coding, refer to the *Technical Appendix*.

improvement planning, and overcrowding); budget and finance (including school fund raising); personnel (principal selection and evaluation, and all other personnel issues); building, security and safety (including discipline); parent and community involvement and neighborhood relations; and finally, "other" topics. Overall, LSCs tended to focus on each type of topic about as frequently as they had during the 1990-91 meetings, except they dealt with fewer personnel issues this year because principal contracts had already been awarded in all of the schools.

Table 4
1991-92 LSC Meeting Descriptions
by Percent of Topics of Discussion by Subject.

	Governance Types			
	Limited	*Moderate*	*Balanced*	*Excessive*
LSC issues	35%	37%	31%	39%
School programs	27%	30%	30%	24%
Budget and finance	11%	10%	10%	17%
Personnel	1%	2%	5%	4%
Parent and community involvement	12%	7%	6%	6%
Other issues	5%	7%	9%	1%
Safety, security & building	9%	5%	8%	10%

On the whole, the councils are quite similar in the frequency with which they discussed different topics (see Table 4). Almost all of them dealt with LSC issues most often, and then with school program issues second. Some slight differences do exist among the four groups of councils, however. The excessive-governance councils had the greatest percentage of LSC topics, the largest percentage of budget and finance topics, and the lowest percentage of school program topics. Often conflicts on these LSCs centered around how to run the council and how to budget school funds. These councils also had the lowest percentage of "other" topics, suggesting their inability to finish school business and move on to a broader agenda. Balanced-governance councils focused their deliberations equally on LSC issues and school programs. The limited-governance LSCs—those with the poorest parent representative attendance—talked about parent and community involvement relatively more frequently than did other councils, which might reflect their need for greater parent and community attendance and participation at council meetings.[6] In all, though, the data in Table 4 demonstrates fairly uniform trends in what councils discussed.

Table 5, presenting the percentage of discussion topics that developed into formal motions, displays some clearer trends about how the LSCs differ. Since we have utilized the total number of motions to help define the four governance approaches (see previous section), it is not too surprising that the percentage of all topics with motions also differentiates each group. Excessive-governance councils proposed many more motions—and many more motions relative to the total number of topics discussed—than other LSCs; they made motions and voted on a total of 43 percent of all their topics. Balanced-governance LSCs made motions on 22 percent of their discussion topics, and moderate councils took formal decisions on 25 percent of their topics. These results are interesting because even though the balanced LSCs tended to make more motions over the course of the year than the moderate councils, they also had more topics of

[6] Parent and community involvement is the only subject dealt with by limited-governance LSCs in which parent and community representatives took equal part in the discussions with the school professionals. On other topics, school professionals dominated the discussion.

discussion and thus a lower ratio of motions to topics. Limited-governance LSCs had the fewest topics of discussion, and they also made motions and voted on those topics—regardless of the subject matter—significantly less often than did other councils.

Table 5
1991-92 LSC Meeting Descriptions
by Percent of Topics of Discussion Leading to Motions

	Governance Types			
	Limited	*Moderate*	*Balanced*	*Excessive*
All topics	6%	25%	22%	43%
LSC issues	7%	25%	17%	35%
School programs	10%	20%	30%	46%
Budget and finance	13%	51%	35%	68%
Personnel	0%	27%	15%	50%
Parent and community involvement	0%	21%	20%	11%
Other issues	0%	7%	13%	0%
Safety, security & building	0%	21%	23%	41%

Within each category of councils, the percentage of topics with motions generally varies little by subject (LSC issues, school programs, etc.). Some important exceptions occur, though. For example, when LSCs talked about budget and finance concerns, they consistently made more motions than when considering other subjects. These figures underscore the critical nature of this LSC responsibility; most councils desire a formal record of their decision making when dealing with the budget.[7] On the other hand, all the groups of LSCs tended to make fewer motions when discussing "other" topics, indicating their less important role in formal decision making on those issues. In addition, balanced councils diverged from their normal decision-making patterns by proposing relatively more motions on school program issues and fewer on LSC and personnel concerns than on the rest of their topics. Excessive-governance LSCs had a much lower ratio of motions to topics when discussing parent and community involvement than overall. Thus, balanced-governance and excessive-governance councils were more likely than other LSCs to change their decision-making habits according to what they were discussing. All councils, though, made more motions on budget topics and fewer motions on issues not directly related to the school.

Rather than clearly differentiating the governance approaches, the distribution of discussion topics defines a set of fairly consistent patterns across groups of LSCs. The primary subject discussed in all the categories was the functioning of the LSC itself (LSC issues), followed closely by school program matters. Groups of councils did, however, differ on the percentage of those topics with motions. A very small percentage of the issues examined by the limited-governance LSCs culminated in motions, whereas 43 percent of the excessive-governance topics resulted in motions. In both cases, the figures depict one aspect of the extreme approaches to school governance adopted by those councils. As would be expected, then, the percentages of topics with motions for balanced and moderate LSCs fell about halfway between those of the extreme councils. The subjects discussed at meetings do not reflect the differences in governance among LSCs; the distinctions become apparent only when we examine those topics that resulted in formal decision making.

[7] The pivotal nature of budget and finance topics is treated in greater detail later in this section.

Participation at Local School Council meetings

As noted earlier, we use the amount of total member participation during the 1991-92 school year[8] in the definition of the four governance approaches. Not surprisingly, then, the groups of LSCs differ in predictable ways with respect to the number of individual members participating in the discussion of any given topic before the council. The excessive-governance LSCs had the highest average number of participants per topic (in spite of slightly lower attendance than the balanced councils); the limited-governance councils had the fewest; and the moderate- and balanced-governance LSCs fell between the two extremes.

Table 6
1991-92 LSC Meeting Descriptions
by Average Number of Participants per Topic of Discussion

	Governance Types			
	Limited	*Moderate*	*Balanced*	*Excessive*
All topics	2.5	3.4	3.8	4.5
LSC issues	2.8	3.3	3.6	4.1
School programs	2.7	3.3	3.9	4.2
Budget and finance	2.9	4.2	4.7	6.1
Personnel	2.0	2.5	3.0	3.3
Parent and community involvement	2.5	3.9	3.6	2.5
Other issues	1.5	2.9	3.6	3.8
Safety, security & building	3.5	4.5	4.7	4.9

Table 6 presents information on the number of participants per topic in terms of the subject matter of the topic. On average, deliberations about budget and finance issues and about safety, security and building matters involved the greatest number of participants across all four LSC categories, while discussions of personnel and "other" topics involved the fewest. Limited-governance LSCs had the lowest participation on every subject, and excessive-governance councils had the highest in five of the seven topic areas. Even though the excessive-governance LSCs had higher overall participation, the moderate-governance group had the highest participation on parent and community involvement issues, and the balanced councils had the highest on personnel topics. The excessive-governance councils averaged an unexpectedly low number of participants on parent and community involvement matters, and they also had extremely high participation rates on budget and finance topics.

Thus, the four groups of councils differed in terms of participation by topic of discussion, with excessive-governance LSCs having the highest overall rate of participation per topic, and limited-governance LSCs having the lowest. Even considering the nature of the subject being discussed, this pattern remains fairly stable.

Across the 14 councils in our sample, participation by member role was distributed as follows: principals took part in 77 percent of all council topics of discussion; chairpersons in 63 percent; on average, the teacher members participated in 30 percent; the community members in 25 percent; and the other (non-chair) parents in just 18 percent of all topics of discussion. These findings are stable from one year to the next; they agree closely with what we reported about LSCs in 1990-91 and 1989-90.

[8] The difference in total participation between any two LSCs is a function of member participation plus the number of meetings held, the attendance at meetings, the length of meetings, and the number of topics discussed. While correlated to each other, these separate variables also have individual meanings.

Table 7
1991-92 LSC Meeting Participation Rates by Role on Council

	Governance Types			
	Limited	*Moderate*	*Balanced*	*Excessive*
Principal	72 %	80 %	63 %	64 %
Chairperson	29 %	57 %	68 %	90 %
Other parents	9 %	17 %	26 %	32 %
Community representatives	10 %	27 %	31 %	24 %
Teachers	39 %	31 %	27 %	41 %
Average parents + community	12 %	25 %	33 %	37 %
Average principal + teachers	50 %	47 %	39 %	49 %

We observed differences from one group of councils to another in the extent of participation by member role (see Table 7). Principals were the most active participants on limited- and moderate-governance councils. In accord with the professional domination of limited-governance LSCs, principals participated on 72 percent of the topics of discussion. Principals were most active on the moderate LSCs, contributing to 80 percent of all discussions. On the excessive-governance and balanced LSCs, principals took part in about two-thirds of the topics discussed. Their relatively lower participation rates indicated that, at those schools, principals did not dominate council discussions.

The greatest differences in participation from group to group occurred among chairpersons and other parent representatives. Chairpersons entered into 57 percent of all discussions at moderate-governance council meetings, and into 68 percent of the discussions at balanced-governance meetings. The limited-governance LSCs had extremely low chairperson participation (29 percent), which indicated problems with parent leadership on these councils. At the opposite extreme, the chairpersons of the excessive-governance LSCs participated in 90 percent of all topics examined by these councils. This is by far the highest participation rate for any council member in any of the four LSC categories, and reflects the strong control of these chairpersons.

The participation of other (non-chair) parent members was also very low for the limited-governance councils.[9] On average, parent representatives on those LSCs took part in fewer than ten percent of all topics discussed during the meetings. At 17 percent average parent participation, the moderate LSCs resemble the limited-governance councils on this measure. The participation rate for parents was considerably higher for the balanced councils (26 percent) than for moderate councils, and highest—at 32 percent—for the excessive-governance LSCs. Clearly, parent representatives were considerably more active council participants on the excessive-governance and balanced LSCs.

Participation rates for community members and teachers also varied from group to group. Community member participation was highest for the balanced-governance LSCs (31 percent) and lowest for the limited-governance councils (ten percent). Teacher participation was higher in the limited- and excessive-governance councils (39 percent and 41 percent, respectively) and lower in the moderate and balanced councils (31 and 27 percent).

These findings can be summarized by examining "professional educator" (principal plus teacher) participation and "other" (chairperson, parent, and community members) participation

[9] Chairperson and other parent participation is highly correlated. Either the chairpersons are representatives of the rest of the parents on the councils, or chairpersons who are active participants are able to draw other parents into the discussions.

across groups of councils (see Table 7). Other members' participation was higher (involvement in about one-third of all council discussions) for the excessive-governance and balanced-governance councils; it was significantly lower for the moderate-governance LSCs, and extremely low for the limited-governance LSCs (at 12 percent). Professional educators' participation was highest for the limited-governance councils (50 percent) and lowest for the balanced-governance LSCs (39 percent).[10]

The varying participation rates of LSC members during the meetings highlight some important contrasts among the groups of councils. First, the extremely low levels of participation for parents and community representatives at the limited-governance LSC meetings is part of the broader pattern of professional dominance in the governance of those schools. Second, parent and community participation was highest for the excessive-governance LSCs, and the chairpersons' participation tended to overshadow that of all other council members. The excessive-governance councils have strong parent leadership that often clashes with professional interests in school governance. Last, balanced-governance LSCs had balanced member participation. Unlike councils in the other categories, the balanced LSCs have chairpersons and principals who share leadership. Moreover, participation rates on those councils did not differ significantly between professional educators and others. Balanced- governance LSCs are balanced both in council leadership and in the representation of all constituencies through participating members.

Figure 2 illustrates the typical patterns of individual participation in the four groups of councils, showing both the differences among the groups and the relationships among members within each group. On the limited-governance LSCs, the principals dominated; both principals and teachers spoke on more topics of discussion than the council chairpersons or other LSC members. On average, only the principals contributed to 50 percent of the councils' total discussions, and just four individuals on these LSCs—the school professionals and the chairpersons—participated in 20 percent or more of the total subjects discussed at meetings.

Like their limited-governance counterparts, moderate-governance principals were also the major participants at their meetings. Chairpersons were the second most active discussants on these LSCs, followed by the teacher representatives. The moderate councils had greater parent and community participation than the limited-governance LSCs, while their chairpersons played a larger role and their teachers a somewhat smaller role in council debate. As an overall category average, both the principals and chairpersons participated in over 50 percent of the LSCs' topics, and seven members, including the three school professionals, the chairperson, both community representatives, and one parent, took part in 20 percent or more of the discussion topics.

On the balanced councils, both the chairperson and principal were leading participants at meetings, and they spoke on topics much more often than other members. The parents, teachers, and community representatives took fairly equal part in council discussions, establishing a balance between professional educators' and others' participation.[11] On the average balanced LSC, both the chairperson and the principal contributed to over 50 percent of all the subjects discussed, and ten of the 11 members were involved in 20 percent or more of the council deliberations.

On the excessive-governance councils, the chairpersons were the dominant participants at meetings. In fact, at 90 percent participation, they were the most active discussants of any LSC members on any councils. Although on the average excessive-governance LSC, the chairperson, the principal, and one parent representative took part in 50 percent or more of council topics of discussion, the participation rates of the latter two are considerably lower than that of the

[10] The patterns just described depend—to a certain degree—on what the council discusses. For example, when limited-governance councils discussed parent and community involvement topics, the parent and community members participated as much as principal and teachers.

[11] School professionals tended to participate more than others in discussions of LSC issues and school programs, but participation on the rest of the topics was about equal.

Figure 2
Distribution of Individual Council Member Participation Rates by Category of Council

Participation Rates	Limited Councils	Moderate Councils	Balanced Councils	Excessive Councils
85% +				CH
80-85%				
75-80%		PR		
70-75%	PR			
65-70%			CH	
60-65%			PR	PR
55-60%		CH		
50-55%				P
45-50%	T			
40-45%				T
35-40%			C	T
30-35%	T	T, T	P, P	P
25-30%	CH	C, C, P	T, P	P
20-25%			T, C, P	C, C, P, P
15-20%		P, P	P	
10-15%	C, P, P	P, P		
5-10%	C, P, P			
0-5%	P			

PR = Principal, CH = Chairperson, T = Teacher, C = Community, P = Parent

chairperson. All 11 LSC members on these councils participated in 20 percent or more of the council discussions, but the teachers clearly contributed to more topics and the community and parent representatives to fewer topics.

In terms of differentiating LSCs, the participation rates of individual council members (in Figure 2) provide evidence for a few more points. First, all of the LSCs except the balanced councils have clear leaders in council discussions; principals lead the limited- and moderate-governance LSCs and chairpersons lead the excessive-governance LSCs. Second, each group of councils differs from the others in terms of average minimal participation (members contributing to 20 percent or more of the discussion topics). Just four members of limited-governance LSCs, seven members of moderate-governance LSCs, ten members of balanced-governance LSCs, and all 11 members of excessive-governance LSCs participated at that level. Similarly, in considering those speaking on 50 percent or more of the subjects deliberated by the councils, only the principals of limited-governance LSCs, the principals and chairpersons of the moderate and balanced LSCs, and the principals, chairpersons, and a parent member of the excessive-governance LSCs participated at this level. Last, parents, community representatives, and teachers have different patterns of participation for each group of councils. On limited-governance LSCs, teachers took part in many more discussions than the community

and parent members, who tended to speak infrequently. On moderate LSCs, teachers and community representatives participated at moderate levels, with most of the parents addressing fewer topics of discussion. Balanced LSCs stand out because representatives of all the constituencies contributed at about the same rate to council discussions, and on excessive-governance LSCs, teachers addressed a few more council topics than parents, and two parents and the community members participated the least.

Member participation in council discussions distinguishes the four groups of LSCs in terms of the average number of participants per topic, the average participation of school professionals and other council members, the average rate of participation by role on the LSC, and the average participation rate of individual council members. The limited-governance LSCs have low participation, strong principal leadership, and complete professional dominance of council discussions. The moderate councils have moderate participation, principal leadership, and relatively low parent participation. Balanced LSCs have high participation, leadership shared by the principal and the chairperson, and balanced participation by representatives of all constituencies. Excessive-governance councils have high participation, very strong parent leadership, and relatively poor participation by community representatives and some parents. Of the four categories, the balanced councils have the most productive styles of participation.

How councils discuss budget and finance topics

How much can we learn about different governance styles by studying the content of LSC discussion? Can we distinguish the groups by the quality and content of their council participation? In order to answer these questions, we conducted an in-depth investigation of how the councils in three (limited, balanced, and excessive) of our four categories discussed a single issue: budget and finance. We deliberately omitted the moderate-governance councils from this analysis because of their position between the limited- and balanced-governance councils. Our interest focussed on the more extreme groups.

We chose to examine budget and finance because it is one of the three mandated council responsibilities (and in our sample, the only one of these areas that all schools considered last year during public meetings). Therefore, this study of budget and finance deliberations also gives us a better idea of how councils go about exercising their official duties.

Tables 4, 5, and 6 show that these three groups of councils differ in the proportion of their topics devoted to budget and finance, in the average participation level in these discussions, and in the proportion of these topics leading to a motion. In all three cases, the limited-governance councils had the least activity and the excessive-governance councils the most. These differences indicate that limited, balanced and excessive councils differ systematically on the amount of activity generated on budget and finance issues.

We pursued this more detailed investigation by locating all topics that dealt with budget and finance. Following a thorough content analysis of the deliberations, we found that we could classify all budget and finance discussion into one of four areas:

Policy presentation:	Ideas, suggestions, and proposals about how the council should spend or raise money.
Policy adoption:	Attempts to persuade or move council members to support or approve a specific budget proposal.
Monitoring:	Reporting or seeking any information that would facilitate development or adoption of budget proposals. Includes information on the amount of money available as well as the guidelines, timelines, and restrictions involved in spending or receiving the funds.
Concern:	Problems or discomfort with the presentation or content of a budget proposal. Includes any indications of distrust, worry, or skepticism.

Table 8 1991-92 LSC Budget and Finance Discussion Description by Category of Council

	Governance Types			
	Limited	*Moderate*	*Balanced*	*Excessive*
Policy presentation	26%	—	11%	10%
Policy adoption	14%	—	14%	14%
Monitoring	48%	—	68%	57%
Concern	12%	—	7%	19%

For each group of councils, we then determined what proportions of their budget and finance discussions were devoted to each of four areas defined above. Table 8 indicates that the groups of councils differed systematically in the content (and by implication the quality) of their discussions about budget and finance. When we compared how these groups distributed their attention to policy presentation, policy adoption, monitoring, and concern, we found the following:

1) *All groups devoted about equal proportions of their budget and finance discussion to policy adoption.*

Regardless of how much total activity was involved in discussing budget and finance, every group of councils devoted 14% of its deliberations to moving or persuading the council to adopt specific budget proposals, involving State Chapter 1, ESEA, and other discretionary monies. They also advocated fund raising activities, including raffle drawings, student picture-taking, and rummage sales, and proposals to apply for monies from private foundations.

2) *The balanced councils requested and discussed more information than the other two groups.*

Balanced councils devoted more than two thirds of their budget and finance discussion to monitoring information. Given that the proportion of discussion spent on policy adoption was the same across councils, balanced councils pursued policy adoption with far more knowledge than either of the other two groups. That is, they rarely advocated or supported policies in the absence of substantial information on the issue. They were much more likely to present background information and raise questions before granting verbal or political support for a budget proposal. In short, the members of balanced-governance councils can be categorized as the most informed decision makers.

As an example, at one LSC meeting, the principal of a balanced-governance council led a line-by-line discussion of both the State Chapter 1 and ESEA proposals. Council members also had copies of the written proposals so that they could closely follow the principal's discussion of the line items. The LSC members could raise questions and concerns about the allocations. Either the principal or another council member was able to satisfy the inquiry or alleviate the concern. Overall, deliberations proceeded smoothly and the LSC was able to approve both proposals unanimously.

3) *The excessive-governance councils expressed considerably more concerns than the others; the balanced councils raised the least.*

Balanced councils dedicated only seven percent of their budget and finance discussion to issues of concern, whereas the excessive-governance councils devoted 19 percent of their budget and finance discussion to raising concerns. The relatively small proportion of concern expressed in balanced councils might be linked to the amount of budgetary information members both sought and provided.

Access to more information enabled an LSC to trust the motivations of the person advocating the budget proposal. In the excessive-governance councils, lack of trust explained the high degree of expressed concern. Members of excessive-governance councils indicated several times that they did not trust the intentions of the individual advocating a proposal. Such suspicions repeatedly resulted in personal conflict, often degenerated into quibbling, and eventually delayed decision making.

For example, in one excessive-governance council the principal presented a brief proposal for spending ESEA money. Other members of the council reported that they felt the proposal was too "skimpy"—it did not indicate precisely how the monies would be spent. One council member said that she "resented" the brevity of the presentation. Another stated, "I am not going to sign a $70,000 bill not knowing what it is going to be spent for." Though the principal responded that everything could not be written down, LSC members were already suspicious of her motivations and began making inquiries into the computation of budget allotments and perceived budget discrepancies. Eventually, accusations were exchanged. After a two hour discussion, the LSC was still not prepared to vote on the proposal. Instead, they delayed their decision making and established a special meeting to investigate the proposal further.

Sometimes members of limited-governance councils also expressed concern. In one meeting, the principal proposed that an unspecified amount of State Chapter 1 money be used to purchase a computer learning system. The two teachers raised numerous concern about the structure and potential effectiveness of the program. They believed that it would be unwise to vote on the proposal when so many questions were left unanswered. Given the concerns posed by these teachers, the council agreed to wait four to eight months to vote on a motion to purchase the program. During that time it was suggested that information be generated on how the program was working at another site.

4) *The limited-governance councils devoted more than twice as much of their budget and finance discussion to policy presentation compared to other councils. Usually, participation was limited to the principal and one teacher.*

In limited-governance councils, the school professionals (i.e. the principal and teacher representatives) dominated policy presentation. They developed all formal budget proposals indicating how to spend or raise monies. They were also three times as likely as other members to present informal proposals—less thought out suggestions on how to allocate or generate monies. The principal was clearly the dominant figure in policy presentation. In the absence of much monitoring of budget and finance issues, policy presentation was relatively more prevalent in limited-governance councils.

We found a different relationship between the school professionals and the other LSC members in other groups of councils. Although the parents and community members were more involved in policy presentation in both the balanced- and excessive-governance councils, they had a different relationship to the principals and teachers. In several cases, the chairperson of an excessive-governance council presented a budget proposal to the LSC that contained many violations of guidelines or procedures. The principal, who was most knowledgeable about these areas, addressed the mistakes. This additional step was time-consuming and complicated, so that other council members lost track of the discussion and were unsure of exactly what the proposal stated. The balanced councils, on the other hand, permitted their principals to draft formal budget proposals that would comply with regulations. Parents and community members then became fully active in altering, revising, and questioning the initial draft. The balanced LSCs were more effective in using the principal's expertise to avoid confusion and errors, which led to more productive meetings.

We can further distinguish our groups of councils by the different roles that the school professionals and other council members played in the areas of monitoring and policy adoption. In all cases, principals and teachers had the greatest knowledge of budgeting guidelines and

procedures, however, in the limited-governance councils, they were the only members who conveyed such information and they were the only LSC members who responded to budget questions during meetings. Also they alone demonstrated knowledge of alternative information or funding sources (e.g. corporations, small businesses).

In excessive-governance councils, the school professionals and parents and community members demonstrated about equal knowledge of budgetary procedures and guidelines. Both also responded to budget questions. However, the information provided was often discrepant and inconsistent. The principal and the chairperson repeatedly generated disagreement in the councils because of their different and conflicting information.

In the balanced-governance councils the teaching professionals exhibited the most knowledge of official budgetary procedures and guidelines. However, parents and community members also demonstrated familiarity with these issues. For example, they responded to several of the budget questions asked during public meetings. Most importantly, the parent and community members were overwhelmingly more active than the principal and teachers when it came to pursuing or having access to alternative sources of information and funding. Again, it appears that though the balanced councils were willing to take advantage of the knowledge of their professionals, they did not allow that expertise to limit the participation of others. Additionally, the roles the teaching professionals and the other members adopted did not generate any council conflict.

Summary

During their 1991-92 meetings, the 14 councils in our sample took one of four approaches to governance—limited, moderate, balanced, or excessive. In this section of the report, we have used some basic meeting data, attendance figures, topics of discussion, participation rates, and an in-depth analysis of participation on finance and budgeting issues to describe those four approaches. We now summarize each approach in terms of those data.

Limited-governance LSCs have numerous, short meetings at which council members typically discuss few (six) topics very briefly. On average, only about two LSC members take part in each topic that the council considers. These LSCs have poor overall attendance, especially among the parent and community representatives. Professional educators dominate limited-governance councils in terms of both attendance and participation in council discussions. The councils consider parent and community involvement issues relatively more often than other LSCs, in part—at least—because of the clear need to nurture this involvement on the council itself. Participation rates show that principals lead these LSCs, and that most parent and community representatives speak very little at meetings. Budget and finance discussion illustrated the dominance of school professionals in most areas of participation, with the principal the most active. In short, limited-governance LSCs rely on principals and teachers to guide the LSC and the school.

Moderate-governance councils have monthly meetings of moderate duration (two hours) at which members usually discuss ten to 11 topics. Attendance at meetings averages between eight and nine adult members. These councils have moderate levels of member participation. The principal attends meetings faithfully, and clearly leads council discussions. The chairperson and teacher representatives also attend regularly and are major participants in council deliberations, leading to a higher overall participation rate for school professionals than for others. Among the other LSC representatives, community members contribute to the discussions more frequently than parents. Moderate councils are principal-directed and—excepting the chairperson—have poor parent participation, but teachers and community representatives are relatively active.

Balanced-governance LSCs hold monthly meetings and a few special meetings when the council work load is heavier. The meetings are of moderate duration, and the council generally considers nine to ten issues per meeting. They tend to have long discussions, and they focus about equally on LSC issues and school programs. Of the four groups of councils, balanced LSCs have the best average attendance; between nine and ten members attend each meeting. This is

true because more parent and community representatives regularly attend the balanced-council meetings than attend meetings at other councils. Overall participation is high, and the chairperson and principal share leadership in council discussions. School professionals' and others' participation are essentially equivalent, and teachers, parents (except the chairperson), and community members take part in the council dealings at very similar levels. The budget and finance discussion demonstrated how knowledge is shared in balanced-governance councils resulting in informed decision making and limited concern. Balanced-governance councils have shared leadership and member participation; members of all constituencies attend regularly, balance their treatment of issues, and maintain a high level of engagement with school governance.

Excessive-governance LSCs have numerous, long meetings during which council members typically consider from nine to ten topics. On the average, eight to nine members attend each meeting, and their participation rate is quite high. The chairperson attends almost every meeting, provides strong council leadership, and participates much more frequently than other council members. In contrast, principal attendance is only about 85 percent, and the principal enters into just two-thirds of the council's discussions. At times, the active parent leadership on these LSCs directly conflicts with professional views of how to run a school (especially the principal's), and principal-council relations inevitably grow strained. Not surprisingly, these LSCs make more formal decisions than others. Excessive-governance LSCs have the highest overall rate of participation, and all members are involved in at least 20 percent of the issues brought before the LSC. Members are willing to attend frequent long meetings that are often frustrating and acrimonious, and to participate actively at those meetings. Concerns often arose in these councils because of discrepant information about budget issues. Unfortunately, members often work at odds with one another, thus limiting the LSC's impact on school improvement.

Characteristics of Governance Styles and Leadership Patterns

The quantitative data described in the previous section show that our councils fall into one of four categories depending on their approach to governance. In this section we take a closer look at these governance styles and further describe characteristics shared by councils in each category. By doing so, we hope to shed light on why some councils appear to be more effective in handling their governance responsibilities. We also examine possible explanations of why members on some councils have a good working relationship and are able to get their work done, while other councils find themselves in constant conflict, unable to move forward.

One factor that helps to differentiate the four groups is council leadership. The degree to which the principal or the LSC chairperson leads the council affects member participation, the exchange of information, and council decision making. Other factors such as the role of the LSC chairperson, the work that councils do outside of the regular LSC meetings, and LSC accountability for decisions are also discussed. Our analysis draws on observations of the 1991-92 LSC meetings and interviews with principals and LSC chairpersons conducted in the summer of 1992. We include several anecdotes about different councils, which are meant to illustrate our discussion. The order of discussion in this section differs from the previous section. First, we discuss limited- and excessive-governance councils. Then we describe the most typical pattern, that seen in the moderate-governance councils. Finally, we end by discussing the LSCs with the best approach to school governance, the balanced-governance councils.

Limited governance

These are the two least active councils in our study, defined by their low member participation in discussions and by the very few formal decisions that they made (topics on which they made motions) during the 1991-92 school year. Quantitative evidence about these councils shows that they have very brief meetings, few votes, and poor parent and community member attendance and participation at meetings. A close look at the participation data reveals a huge disparity between the school professionals on the council (principal and teachers) and the other members. One meeting observer commented that even when parent and community members do attend meetings, they are more like spectators than participants. Thus, our quantitative data indicates that the professional educators, especially the principal, have a larger role in running these LSCs than the parent and community members.

Of the few formal decisions that these councils made, most involved approving a mandated plan or document brought to the floor by the principal, who often provided little explanation of the matter. Most votes took place after little or no deliberation. Instead, the councils automatically accepted the recommendation of the principals, exhibiting trust in their judgment, or reluctance to question it. As one of these principals said,

> *They (the LSC) immediately approved all budgets. They immediately approved the dress code. They immediately approved our SIP plan, each year, the rolling plan. We explain it to them, I think fully, and they just automatically approve it.*

This comment describes the relationship between the principal and the parent and community council members. The principals in the limited-governance category exerted considerable influence over council members and, to a large extent, they dominated council meetings. They ran the meetings, made announcements, and informed council members of school business and of the decisions they had made. These principals used council meetings as a forum to update members on school matters, rather than as the appropriate vehicle for discussing important issues and making informed policy decisions. Substantive discussion, open debate, and

meaningful exchange of ideas and information were unusual or absent at these council meetings. Instead, members gave cursory attention to complex matters (like school budgets and student test score results), and principals provided brief summaries only when necessary. While the principals seemed to dominate and control the councils, the parent and community members appeared to accept this imbalance and trust the principal implicitly on school matters. They were usually content to let the principal make the important council decisions.

The actions of these principals at council meetings may be shaped by their perceptions of the other council members. One principal questioned the experience that her fellow council members bring to the table. She described her council in these terms:

> *I feel my council realizes their limitations. They do not understand fully the work of the Board of Education, the bureaucracy, the budget, the system in general. So they feel that we are the experts, the teachers and myself. And so they basically just vote on certain things and let us handle most of the planning.*
>
> *I think because they are limited, they just sit back and whatever we say, goes. And I have no problems with that... I don't think they are aggressive enough to even ask the questions.*

The principal of the other limited-governance LSC did not question the knowledge of other council members, but instead felt that her dominance of the council arose from other members' trust in her:

> *I'm not bothered by the fact that they're passive. I'm not even bothered by the fact that sometimes they're absent because I see it as a sign that they're not worried about the decisions. I see it as a trust. There's a certain trust level involved.*
>
> *They're not really concerned about things that are not their concern. They learned what their role was and they kind of know that it's, you know, not to get involved in other issues.*

Both principals said that they lead their councils because the other LSC members allow—or force—them into that role.

Although the principals generally took charge of these LSCs and their business, the teacher representatives and the principals did not always see eye-to-eye. Teachers often asked questions and contributed to council discussions, and they sometimes challenged the principals' plans. All three school professionals tended to be active members on the limited-governance LSCs, but most of the time, the principal remained firmly in charge.

Generally these councils are characterized by little conflict. In fact, the principals view the councils as their "allies." Despite this, these principals made few attempts to assist council members in making good decisions, either by presenting complete information about issues or by encouraging LSC members to get training. Although the principals recognized their councils' shortcomings, they did not spend time explaining issues, helping with the decision-making process, or developing other council leaders in 1991-92. We have considerable evidence to show that principals are heavily burdened by their responsibilities.[13] They work very long hours and school reform has increased their duties, including the LSC, and has made them more accountable for their schools. Principals at other schools, however, have made a greater priority of "activating" their councils than have these principals.

Some parents and community representatives showed little responsibility for their mandated duties. Many members could have been removed for poor attendance under the revised school reform law. Few took advantage of training opportunities that might have helped them to acquire new skills and knowledge, and to reduce the imbalance between themselves and the professional

[13] See A.L. Bennett, A.S. Bryk, J.Q. Easton, D. Kerbow, S. Luppescu and P.A. Sebring. *Charting Reform: The Principals' Persepective.* Chicago: The Consortium on Chicago School Research.

educators on the councils.

The combination of principals willing to take control and council members willing to limit their involvement to approving plans from the principals and teachers results in these limited-governance councils that have little or no "added value" for their schools. Because both the principals and council members seem satisfied with this arrangement, only major changes on the LSCs (new members or new leaders) are likely to improve the quality of their decision-making process and hence, of their effectiveness as councils. School improvement can still occur, regardless of their centralized, principal-dominated governance structure. School personnel at both schools have planned and implemented new programs. The councils, however, constitute a potential, unused resource.

The following illustration from one of the limited-governance LSCs highlights the principal's control over—and the councils' marginal involvement with—a uniform dress code. Comparable examples are fairly common in meeting observers' notes from the limited-governance council meetings.

Illustration 1.
One Council Surveys Parents on Desirability of a Uniform Dress Policy

December	*LSC members and guests discussed the merits of creating a uniform dress policy at this school. The council decided that parent input was important and that a survey should be administered.*
January	*The principal reported that parent survey was being prepared and would be distributed at the end of the month. Results would be available at the next meeting.*
February	*The principal suggested that a parent survey be administered on report card pickup day.*
March	*No discussion of uniforms or of survey.*
April	*The principal reported that a parent survey had been administered and would be tallied soon. Results would be made available to the LSC.*
May	*A teacher member of the council reported that the uniform survey yielded 319 "yes" votes and that the school's total enrollment was 625 students. No questions asked and no information provided about how many "no" votes or how many surveys completed.*
June	*No quorum at meeting, however principal informed council that she would send a letter to all parents telling them that students would be wearing uniforms in September.*

Council members rarely question the principal. The principal does not appear to provide consistent or full information to the council.

Excessive governance

These are the two most active councils in our study. They had both longer meetings and more meetings (an average of over 16 at about two and one half hours each), many more motions and votes, and higher levels of participation during discussions than the other LSCs. Although these councils scheduled regular LSC meetings for once a month, they often had to call additional special meetings to deal with a crisis or to finish the agenda from a regular meeting. The extra amount of time and energy these councils expended did little to increase their effectiveness or productivity. On the contrary, the additional activity tended to be counterproductive and symptomatic of their inability to resolve conflicts.

We characterize these councils as highly bureaucratic, legalistic, and distrustful. This is evidenced by the large number of motions they made. On average, the councils proposed more than twice as many motions as any other group of LSCs, and many times more than the limited-governance councils. Whereas most councils vote to approve a policy or plan, these councils often use motions and votes to direct the principal to carry out specific requests. Such motions direct the principal to provide information, implement a policy, or take some other designated action.

At one unremarkable LSC meeting, the council approved 11 different motions directing the principal to take some action. These included, for example:

- ✓ Resubmit budget at next meeting
- ✓ Present statistics on summer school program
- ✓ Give finance committee chair the access code number for computerized internal accounts
- ✓ Clarify administrative positions by providing job descriptions and an administrative plan
- ✓ Pay consultant from unspent funds

Other councils are more apt to request information from the principal, rather than mandating it through official motions and votes.

These demands to the principal signify the vast amount of conflict and ill will among council members. Council meetings at these two schools are notable for the high level of distrust that members exhibit. Much of the conflict revolves around the principal and the chairperson, who frequently take opposite positions on issues, hampering any effective decision making. In addition, factions developed on both LSCs, focussing council energies on personalities and not on the matters of school business. Members voted with their allies, regardless of the topic. One chairperson said that council members "... have a problem separating the issues from the personality." He also compared his council to "11 pit bulls guarding their territory."

Conflict is present to some degree in almost all councils, and may be desirable as an indicator of change and new ideas. Councils that engage in thoughtful discussion of different perspectives are bound to have disagreements. However, these two councils are clearly hampered by the excessive amount of conflict and are unable to make meaningful contributions to school improvement that require broad participation and compromise.

One of our meeting observers described these two councils as being in a state of gridlock. They are unable to get much accomplished because they consume so much time in unresolved debates. These councils are characterized by extreme conflict preventing them from moving ahead with their LSC duties. (These councils discussed more LSC procedural issues than any other set of councils). Some meetings started off well, but then degenerated into interpersonal bickering, included assaults on members' personal character. This outward animosity further thwarted the councils' attempts to make rational decisions.

Some of the conflict on these councils arises from a basic misunderstanding of, or a difference of opinion about, the roles and responsibilities of the principal and the Local School Council. One principal described the differences in perspective as follows:

> *They think they're the decision-making body and that I take part in the decisions. When they hired me, (it was) "we will tell you what to do." Because I will not do what they tell me to do if it's illegal, immoral, unethical or I just simply don't feel right about it, then we're on opposite sides of the fence. They have been fighting me for over a year now.*

The turmoil that some principals predicted with the creation of Local School Councils is a reality in these two schools. The principal and the chairperson have opposing views on who should be leading the council, and on what decisions it should make. The chairpersons see themselves as the heads of the councils, and seek a broad decision-making role for their councils.

The principals, on the other hand, see themselves as the experts, and therefore favor narrower powers for the councils.

Over the academic year, principal-council relations grew more strained at both schools in this category. By the end of the year, the principal of the elementary school had decided to remain in her office during LSC meetings, being informed of events only by messengers. In September, 1992, she retired. Although the high-school principal attended LSC meetings faithfully, council relations at that school were no less stormy. At a June meeting, after an executive session on principal evaluation, the high-school council unanimously approved a motion to conduct an investigation for the purpose of finding just cause to remove the principal. The following anecdote from meetings of the high-school LSC illustrates some of the problems with overly active and formalistic school governance.

Illustration 2. Conflict on an LSC.

At a meeting in mid-January, the high-school council received a draft of a new discipline code prepared by the LSC discipline committee. In the second half of the meeting, they voted down both a motion by the principal to table the discipline code and a second motion to adopt it. Rather than give up on a new, explicit discipline policy that—through compromise—promised to benefit all, LSC members then tried to set a date to examine a revised draft of the code. Six of the ten council members at the meeting entered into a debate about when to schedule the next special meeting on the issue. The principal asked for a postponement of several weeks in order to translate the document and to make and disperse copies to faculty and parents. Members of the LSC discipline committee argued against such a long delay because they believed that the school needed the policy immediately and that the LSC could spend the rest of the school year fine-tuning it to address problems of implementation. The LSC defeated three more motions about the date of the next special meeting and finally, near desperation from their inability to make such a basic scheduling decision, they approved the chairperson's motion to meet again in a week (without specifying the exact date).

The next special meeting, held eight days later, opened with a teacher representative angrily raising a point of order about the date of the meeting. He thought that the LSC had scheduled it for the previous day (seven days after the last meeting). In total, eight of the ten LSC members in attendance participated in the ensuing discussion about the date of the special meeting. They referred to the minutes of the previous meeting without clarifying the point. Tempers flared as they talked about amending the minutes, and they eventually approved them as written. The teacher representative who had raised the point of order wanted to take action to prevent this type of confusion in the future. He made a motion that the LSC purchase a tape recorder and tape every LSC meeting, and it carried unanimously.

Unfortunately poor LSC relations and differing opinions about how the discipline code should have been presented at the first meeting interfered with the normally straightforward procedure for scheduling a special meeting. They also led to continued controversy at the second meeting. LSC members expressed anger, distrust of one another, and frustration with the time wasted on this inconsequential matter. Both council-member participation and the number of motions made on this scheduling issue were characteristically high. As indicators of the excessive-governance approach, they point to real problems that constrain the effectiveness of these LSCs.

Moderate governance

Half of the councils in our study belong in the moderate-governance group. According to the two defining variables, number of topics with motions and amount of member participation, these councils fall between the balanced-governance councils (the ones we find most effective) and the limited-governance councils (those with the least activity). In some ways the moderate-governance LSCs are much more like the limited-governance councils. For example, parents (excluding the chairperson) are relatively uninvolved in council matters. In others, the moderate-governance councils resemble the balanced-governance LSCs. For instance, the chairperson

has a relatively strong role in council business, although more as a facilitator than as a leader.

We believe that moderate-governance councils and their meetings are more typical of Chicago's LSCs than our other councils. From our observations we characterize the moderate councils as having the following qualities: 1) the principal actively leads the council; 2) the LSC chairperson plays an effective role in facilitating council procedures, but looks to the principal for leadership; 3) council members become actively involved only under special conditions; and 4) meetings generally are run efficiently and conducted in a cordial atmosphere.

Principals actively lead the councils. Because these principals are already leaders of their schools, most appear comfortable with their role as leaders of their LSC. LSC chairpersons generally made certain that the LSCs covered their agendas efficiently during meetings, but they deferred to the principals as the true council leaders.

The principals of the moderate-governance councils act as the information experts, and they initiate discussion and provide direction for the meetings. In doing so, the principals become the primary participants as well as the leaders of the councils. Several principals of moderate-governance LSCs noted the that their council leadership is appropriate and that it satisfies all parties. As one principal said:

> *Now they may not have come up with the major ideas—that's my role, to put it out before them and they are to react, to discuss, to debate, and to make the decision to approve or disapprove. I don't think they're the type of council who wants to take over and dictate everything. No, I think that they feel that my role as principal is the person who's supposed to run the school, and if I'm the person at the helm, I should have the ideas.*

On moderate-governance councils, the principals contributed far more to the discussions than the LSC chairpersons. The LSC chairpersons limited themselves to seeing that council procedures were followed. The chairpersons introduced topics, called for motions and moved the council through the agenda, but they generally regarded the principals as the council leaders. The LSC chairpersons on moderate-governance LSCs were not likely to initiate discussion, ask members for their opinions, or offer their own viewpoints concerning specific topics. When a teacher, for example, proposed a new program to one council, the chairperson was not comfortable prodding for more details, inquiring about alternative solutions or getting other council members involved in the discussion. She instead asked, "Are there any questions?" and when no one responded, moved on to the next agenda item.

The chairpersons of these councils generally conducted meetings smoothly. Sometimes, though, they turned to the principal or another council member for guidance on a procedural matter. During one meeting, for example, a council discussed the problem of non-attending members and raised the question of removing these members. The chairperson, unsure of the legislation and uneasy about facilitating the discussion, turned the chair over to the principal for that topic. The principals of these councils said that they are satisfied with the role of their LSC chairperson, noting that most of them are holding their first leadership position and are earnest in learning their role.

Members of the moderate-governance LSCs discuss some issues very thoroughly and thoughtfully, but only those of great interest or that require immediate action. They resemble the limited-governance councils in that most members participate little on most council issues. One principal characterized her LSC in the following manner:

> *If I had to describe them, I would say they are actively passive. They want to be active, but I have found that people really get involved when they are unhappy. They rarely get involved when things are going well. On the whole I think things have gone fairly well this year. We had a real problem when we were so overcrowded and there was no new school building and that gave them a cause and they were extremely active trying to get the new building.*

One example of moderate-governance activism during a crisis appears in Illustration 3, where

an LSC gathered its resources in response to a threat to school property.

Illustration 3. Save the Playground

Although moderate-governance LSCs generally approach school governance in a modestly active way, they can mobilize themselves and the rest of the school community into a very active team when confronted with a crisis at school. For example, the Chicago Public Schools' Bureau of Real Estate and Capital Assets Management sent a letter to one council about a commercial developer's offer to purchase a playground lot attached to the school. At the following LSC meeting, the principal read the letter, passed out flyers about a meeting to organize the protest of this action, and asked council members to take part in the protest. In addition to the personal involvement of every LSC member, the council itself approved three motions to denounce the sale: 1) that the chairperson and the principal write a letter to the Board stating their "absolutely firm and unshakable opposition to the sale"; 2) that an ad hoc committee of faculty, parents and neighbors be formed to fight the sale; and 3) that the LSC reaffirm its long-range plans (in the school improvement plan) to expand kindergarten and preschool services, stressing that the playground in question is a vital component of that plan.

At the next monthly LSC meeting, the principal reported that their great fight against the playground sale had been successful. The committee had organized the efforts of many people. Over 1800 people had signed a petition protesting the sale, and the district superintendent had written a letter saying the playground was used every day. They even persuaded the alderman to propose an ordinance changing the zoning of the playground from commercial to residential use, thus preempting new offers from developers. This moderate-governance council became very active when faced with a real crisis for the school.

Although principals of moderate councils generally encouraged input, the LSC members were hesitant to speak up, especially on issues related to school programs. Because most principals kept their councils well informed, council members were satisfied with the principals' explanations and usually did not pursue issues further. Several principals noted that some members are unfamiliar with the day-to-day operations of the school and cannot fully participate in policy discussions. One principal said:

> *I think that two parents are holding back, not because they don't want to be involved, but because they are overwhelmed by the amount of business that has to be taken care of and they know they have little experience with any of this. They really don't know what's going on inside the school. I think for them this first year (of their term) especially is a time for them to gather as much information about how things work, what's going on here, and how they can play a role on the council.*

Moderate councils had the fewest meetings and covered more topics per meeting than other councils. Four of the moderate councils met once a month even during the spring when they approved the SIP and budget, and evaluated the principal. The other three councils held one extra meeting each during the spring. This contrasts with the balanced councils, which held at least two extra meetings each during the same period.

Meetings are generally run efficiently and conducted in a pleasant atmosphere. The relationship between the principals and LSC members is cordial. The councils generally conduct their business efficiently as they move from one topic to the next with explanations from the principals, but without in-depth discussion from other LSC members. The following example (Illustration 4) depicts a typical meeting of the same moderate-governance council that so effectively defended its playground lot in the previous example.

Illustration 4. An Abbreviated Moderate-Governance Council Meeting

7:11 p.m. (CH = Chair, PR = Principal, OT = Other)

CH: Calls meeting to order. Calls the roll. Calls for approval of the minutes of the last meeting.

OT: Motion made and second to the motion.

CH: Conducts a voice vote; announces approval of the minutes. Calls for old business.

PR: Gives brief report on the steps taken to expand preschool services.

CH: Asks if there is any more discussion of the preschool expansion report. (No response) Calls for new business. Announces that the first item of new business is updating the schedule of LSC meetings. Passes out a revised schedule, noting that two dates do not fit the regular meeting schedule due to holidays.

PR: Moves to accept new schedule. (No second)

CH: Conducts a voice vote; announces approval of the new LSC schedule. Calls for the next item of new business.

PR: Briefly discusses the need for a school improvement plan and budget committee. Moves to form the committee.

OT: Seconds the motion.

CH: Conducts a voice vote; announces approval of the committee.

PR: Indicates that anyone wishing to participate on the committee should contact the Chair.

CH: Calls for the next item of new business on LSC training.

PR: Gives the details of one training opportunity and urges LSC members to sign up.

CH: Any questions? (None) Calls for the next item of new business, the transportation report.

PR: Discusses the school's bus service over the last few years and his rating of the service in the report. Moves that the LSC approve his transportation report.

OT: Seconds the motion.

CH: Any questions? (None) Conducts a voice vote; announces LSC endorsement of the transportation report. Calls for the next item of new business.

PR: Describes the parent education programs at the school. Asks for suggestions. Fields a question, and then explains the programs in greater detail.

OT: (Several LSC members comment on parent education programs during the previous school year.)

CH: Any questions?

PR: Recaps the points made in this discussion.

CH: Calls for the next item of new business, forming an attendance boundary policy.

PR: Discusses at length the problems of overcrowding and the lack of a school policy on enrollment.

OT: (Numerous questions from LSC members and guests.)

PR: Responds to questions and elaborates.

Interruption—two parent members must leave early

(No resolution on attendance boundary policy)

PR: Suggests that the LSC adjourn to a short executive session before the two parent members leave to fill a parent member vacancy.

Brief executive session

CH: Offers a position as a parent representative to a candidate in the audience who accepts and joins the LSC. Gives the chairperson's report, which consists of reviewing correspondence the council has received. Calls for the principal's report.

PR: Gives a brief report, emphasizing the numerous faculty members who have been ill.

OT: (Several comments on faculty health problems.)

PR: Calls for the district representative's report. (None) Calls for open forum.

CH: Notes that there was no report from the school's fund-raising committee. Asks if anyone has anything to say for open forum.

OT: (Make announcements and ask questions of the principal.)

Adjournment by mutual agreement at 8:20 p.m.

Balanced governance

We call these councils "balanced" because they had relatively high levels of both total participation and of formal decision making (number of topics with motions); yet they avoided excessive amounts of activity. That is, they maintained a "balanced" position between high and excessive levels of energy and involvement. In fact, as shown by the quantitative analysis in the previous section, they have many different balances. For example, they balanced high principal and teacher attendance with high parent and community member attendance. Neither the chairpersons nor the principals dominated the leadership role, so that their participation at meetings was balanced. The content of their meetings was also balanced. They paid greater attention to school program issues than other LSCs, while maintaining an equal focus on Local School Council matters.

From our observations, we have found that other qualities also distinguish these councils from the rest. They include the following: 1) the principal encourages members to ask questions and request relevant and necessary information, resulting in higher quality council discussions; 2) the chairperson is adept at facilitating communication on the council and drawing out member participation; 3) council members are able to disagree without personal hostility; 4) councils have an "activist" attitude that goes beyond the limits of regular council business; and 5) councils hold themselves accountable for follow-up and implementation of their decisions.

The principals on balanced councils encourage members to ask questions, to request pertinent information, and to offer suggestions resulting in higher quality council discussions. One principal, for example, mentioned to her council that she was stymied by the poor attendance at parent training workshops. She asked the council for advice on increasing parent involvement. Council members then asked the principal several questions. What kind of programs had there been in the past? Which ones were well attended? What role did the PTA play in getting parents into the school? Members also offered possible explanations for the poor attendance at parent workshops. The council discussed whether some of these activities could be done in conjunction with report card pick up day, when most parents are in the school. They also suggested other types of activities that would get parents into the school. A few members volunteered to work further on the issue and to report their findings to the council at a later meeting. The discussion provided the principal with several new ideas and gave LSC members a better picture of parent participation in the school.

Members of balanced-governance councils respect each others' opinions and viewpoints. One LSC chairperson characterized her council as follows:

> *... our council members are informed. Everyone seems to read the materials... I think we have some very bright people on our council and they pick up on a lot of the subtleties of some of the issues.*

Although the principals are still considered the school experts and the primary information providers, they do not run the meetings or dictate council procedures. These responsibilities are left to the council chairpersons, who are relatively adept at facilitating communication. The chairpersons played a role in encouraging less vocal members to speak up. They sometimes specifically asked quiet members to express their opinions and thereby help to develop a more participatory decision-making process.

All of the balanced-governance councils (as well as most of the moderate councils described in the previous section) conducted their meetings in an organized manner. Councils followed an agenda and were usually able to get through it without limiting fruitful discussions. The chairpersons closed discussions before they got long-winded and repetitive. As one noted, "It was my responsibility to keep the reins on the meeting and make sure we kept on point."

Members on balanced councils are able to disagree with one another without provoking personal hostility. Disagreements are bound to occur as a natural part of the decision-making process, yet these council members avoided personalizing their different points of view. When asked about conflicts on the council, one principal remarked:

> *I would say gentlemanly conflict. They have always seemed to have had sides or points of view, but they've been very mannerly about it and they've been able to come to a consensus most of the time.*

Although these LSCs did have occasional heated debates, the chairpersons intervene and redirected the discussions before they got out of hand. During one council meeting, for example, an LSC was discussing staff cuts in the bilingual and English-as-a-Second-Language program. One parent representative suggested that the remaining staff divide the work done by a staff member about to be laid off. She commented that this is a tough time financially for the school system and that everyone must pitch in to get the work done. This parent member questioned the commitment of teachers by noting that several leave the school as soon as the children are dismissed for the day. In defense of the teachers, the principal responded, "There is no one in this building who doesn't spend far more time than is required on site and doing work at home." The parent continued to press her point and the principal responded again. When it was evident that no further fruitful discussion would result, the chairperson shifted the focus of the discussion back to council's role in the issue. The chairperson suggested that the LSC draft a letter arguing against changing the funding formula for bilingual students. The council agreed with this idea, and the chairperson offered to write it. Changing the direction of the discussion not only resulted in concrete action, but it also averted a potentially contentious situation.

Balanced councils are also characterized by an activist attitude that takes their obligations beyond the monthly council meetings. They have working committees that meet regularly, requiring council members to devote time outside of regular council meetings. Committees report to the full council and, for certain issues, ask the council to vote on proposed motions. When one of these LSCs had committee-meeting attendance problems, the chairperson brought the matter before the council and asked members to develop a more effective committee structure. The LSC then spent time discussing committees roles and responsibilities and revised the structure by adding more current LSC members to committees.

In addition to committee work, many members of balanced-governance councils volunteered to take on extra tasks such as writing letters, presenting testimony at hearings before the Chicago Board of Education, contacting outside experts for advice, and calling area businesses for resources. Like the moderate-governance councils, the balanced councils were most active when critical issues demanded immediate attention. These LSCs could quickly coalesce to deal with external events that could affect them negatively. We observed two instances in which balanced LSCs became actively involved with other governing bodies, including the Illinois State Legislature (over State Chapter 1 funds) and the Chicago Board of Education (regarding a proposed merger with a neighboring school). The LSCs in these two schools quickly mobilized and lobbied against the threatened actions.

Finally, balanced councils hold themselves more accountable for their decisions than other councils. All councils have some difficulty converting their ideas into action. Council members may raise issues, discuss them, and even decide on an initial plan, only to have trouble executing it later. Although the balanced councils also struggle with implementing decisions, they have established better procedures to instill accountability among members.

For example, when deciding to take action on a particular plan, the chairperson of one council first seeks volunteers. If no one comes forward, she then assigns specific responsibilities to members. The same chairperson makes a habit of summarizing a decision and then clarifying members' assigned tasks to ensure that everyone understands what has finally been decided, and who is responsible for the work. She also reviews minutes from previous meetings to remind her of LSC decisions, and then asks members if they have completed their designated duties. When issues are not resolved during a meeting, the chairperson places them on the agenda for subsequent meetings. She convinces the council to bring some closure to the discussion, or to take the next step in an ongoing, complex task. She accepts the responsibility for nudging the council to make a decision or take action. At times this is a difficult job, and one that some chairpersons choose not do.

This section concludes with two illustrations (5 and 6) of balanced-governance councils. The first reconstructs a thoughtful discussion about the LSC's role and displays broad participation of members, skillful council leadership, openness on the part of the principal and several other characteristics of these councils. The final example describes the the relationship among a principal, LSC, and teacher group. The LSC rejected a proposal from teachers, but because of good working relations and regular communication, they accepted the LSC decision. This final example takes the idea of balance a step beyond the council itself to describe relations with other sites of authority in the school.

Illustration 5. Strong Principal, LSC, and PPAC Relations

By the third year of school reform, the principal, the LSC, and the Professional Personnel Advisory Committee (PPAC) at Olympia school had developed an effective and close working relationship. Although the principal, a long-time Chicago Public Schools veteran, had been accustomed to making decisions by himself, as early as 1990 he characterized himself as "adapting" to new modes of decision making. The changes here resulted from gentle insistence on the part of the LSC and a willingness to adapt on the part of the principal. The principal and the LSC created an environment for teachers to become more involved in the decision-making process.

Early on, the members of the LSC wanted to know what teachers thought about the issues that came before the council. They asked the principal and teacher members, "What do the teachers think of that?" "Do the teachers agree with you on that?" "Why haven't the teachers discussed this?" The questioning attitude of the LSC helped the teachers coalesce and become more active in school planning. Recognizing the possibilities of the new administrative structure, a new PPAC chairperson recruited all teachers to participate in school improvement planning.

This council did not initiate specific educational programs on its own, but sought input from both the faculty and from the principal. In 1992, the principal began to work on the School Improvement Plan (SIP) in February, setting up five SIP committees. Although LSC members were invited to join these committees, they were composed solely of teachers.

During the planning process, the PPAC chairperson reported to the LSC. The council became very interested in a new science program that the PPAC was proposing. The initial proposal called for a start-up year when teachers would receive additional pay to review current science materials and to plan the new program. They would also purchase mobile science carts for the coming school year. In the second year, the school would hire a full-time science teacher to serve as either a resource teacher or classroom instructor if space was available. The LSC embraced this program, and challenged the PPAC and the SIP committees to consider a variety of logistical and educational arrangements.

At this time, school personnel became aware that decreased student enrollment would probably lead to a reduction in the number of regular classroom teachers assigned to Olympia. The PPAC began to back away from their proposal to hire a science specialist, and suggested instead that the funds be used to maintain the present staff members who would be lost due to decreased enrollment.

The LSC, however, believed that the science program was the better alternative and decided to include it in the School Improvement Plan. The PPAC, having initiated the science program, accepted the LSC decision, even though it meant that they would face a reduction in regular classroom teachers. The PPAC accepted the LSC's priorities for the school, perhaps because of their own involvement in the planning process.

Illustration 6. One Council Discusses its Role and its Effectiveness.

The following is a reconstruction, based on detailed written notes, of discussion at one council meeting.
(CH = Chairperson PR = Principal T1/T2 = Teachers P2/P5 = Parent C1/C2 = Community)

CH: I think that this would be a good time for us to talk about our council and its role in the school, and to reflect on how well we've done together over the past nine months. What can we do to be more effective?

P4: I can think of several things that would improve this council. First, we'd be better off if everyone attended all of the meetings. Second, I think that everyone should be expected to give an opinion on important issues, even if the meetings take longer. Third, if we had budgets a little earlier, we could read them ahead of time. We did pretty well this year, but next year we could do better. Now that I've been on the council for a year, I know the position better.

PR: Can you tell me a little more about what it is that you want to get earlier?

CH: I think mostly in areas where we don't have any background or any opportunity to understand.

T1: We could get information into council members' folders before meetings.

CH: The Friday before each meeting.

PR: We could begin a "roundtable" discussion on each motion so that everyone can give their opinion.

T1: I agree with P4 that it's hard to have an opinion when you don't know the background. Council members should come into the school to see what's going on during the day.

CH: If we did come during the day, what would you like us to do?

PR: The best way to get a good understanding of the school would be to shadow me. We couldn't do it all in one day, but it would give you a broad introduction to the complexities of school life and the life of the kids. I think that you'd be shocked at the number of decisions made. We deal with school policy at the LSC meetings, but school life is very complex. (*PR describes a well known study where researchers followed principals around their schools and counted the number of decisions that had to be made.*)

We might have made a mistake by having people off the council do so much of our committee work, because the council hasn't seen as much of the decision-making process. We have limited ourselves to policy issues—what is most important—but council members can go beyond that role and be more involved in fund raising and grant writing. We've had some excellent new ideas, and I would welcome people to become involved in developing them.

C1: Maybe we should go around the council and ask each member why he or she ran and develop a strategy about what members want to get out of next year. It's important to look at the council as a team. Someone can be a council expert in one area and come back and share their information. This is what happened when Hal learned about the Park District project.

PR: We got some good concrete results from that.

P3: We can work both individually and as a team. I would like to work with Mr. Z and the study hall. I'm also interested in convincing neighbors to enroll their children in this school instead of in the parochial school. I think that we should have a "project approach," that is, don't just talk but get involved and get some results.

PR: That approach will help you know what goes on in the school.

P3: I'm learning a lot about the school just by answering the phone. But I don't know how much you can tolerate us hanging around you.

PR: I don't mind. I might not be able to answer all of your questions immediately.

P2: I had a bad year at work so didn't get as involved as I wanted to. But I did look at the School Improvement Plan and got very excited—especially the computer part. I think it's a good school. I'm still confused about the committee structure, though. Maybe we should have more committee presentations and reports to the council.

P3: We did have a list of committees, but it probably has changed since then.

P2: This year we spent a lot of time just trying to survive. (*This school was targeted for consolidation with another school.*)

C2: The system budget deficit is a big mess. But we can talk about that later.

This discussion continued by reviewing specific committees and their current agendas.